

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1. (currently amended) A method of ~~validating postage processing a mail piece~~, the method comprising:

~~generating a data corresponding to a postage indicium associated with a mail piece at a vendor-controlled centralized postage issuing computer system;~~

~~associating an indexing tracking ID with the postage indicium, wherein the indexing tracking ID and postage indicium are independent;~~

~~storing the indexed postage indicium data within a database of [[a]] the centralized postage issuing computer system;~~

~~transmitting the indexing tracking ID to an end user computer;~~

~~receiving a postage indicium request from a postal authority, the postage indicium request containing the indexing tracking ID; and~~

~~applying the indexing tracking ID to the mail piece;~~

~~reading the indexing tracking ID on the mail piece; and~~

~~retrieving the indexed postage indicium data from the database based on the read indexing tracking ID to validate the postage.~~

2. (currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the indexing tracking ID is unique within [[a]] the postal authority service.

3. (currently amended) The method of claim 2, wherein the postal authority service is the United States Postal Service.

4. (currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the postage indicium data comprises data representative of one or more items selected from the group consisting of postage

amount, date and time of postage information creation, service class, optional data advance, and delivery zip code.

5. (currently amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 deriving a digital signature from the postage indicium data;
 associating the digital signature with the postage indicium data to generate [[an]] indexed self-validating postage indicium data; and
 storing the indexed self-validating postage indicium data within the centralized postage-issuing computer system.

6. (currently amended) The method of claim 5, wherein the digital signature association comprises attaching the digital signature to the postage indicium data.

7. (currently amended) The method of claim 5, wherein the digital signature is generated by applying a private key to the postage indicium data.

8. (currently amended) The method of claim 5, wherein the indexed self-validating postage indicium data is generated within a physically secure coprocessor device.

9. (currently amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 receiving an indexing identifier request from [[an]] the end user computer prior to transmitting the indexing tracking ID to the end user computer; and
~~transmitting the indexing tracking ID to the end user computer.~~

10. (currently amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
~~receiving a postage indicium request containing the indexing tracking ID from a postal authority;~~
~~retrieving the indexed postage indicium from the database based on the received indexing tracking ID; and~~
 transmitting the indexed postage indicium data to the postal authority.

11. (currently amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
generating a plurality of postage ~~indicia~~ indicium data sets associated with a plurality of mail pieces;

associating a plurality of indexing tracking IDs with the plurality of postage ~~indicia~~ indicium data sets; and

storing the plurality of indexed postage ~~indicia~~ indicium data sets within the database.

12-13. (cancelled)

14. (currently amended) A method of ~~validating postage for a postal service~~ processing a mail piece, the method comprising:

~~generating a postage indicium associated with a mail piece;~~

~~associating an indexing tracking ID with the postage indicium;~~

~~storing the indexed postage indicium within a database;~~

~~applying the indexing tracking ID to the mail piece;~~

reading ~~the an~~ indexing tracking ID on ~~the a~~ mail piece; and

~~transmitting a postage indicium request to a vendor, wherein the request comprises the read indexing tracking ID; and~~

~~receiving data corresponding to a postage indicium, the postage indicium being associated with the indexing tracking ID,~~

~~wherein the indexing tracking ID is readable on the mail piece independent of the data corresponding to the postage indicium.~~

~~retrieving the indexed postage indicium from the database based on the read indexing tracking ID to validate the postage.~~

15. (currently amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the indexing tracking ID is unique within the postal authority service.

16. (currently amended) The method of claim 15, wherein the postal authority service is the United States Postal Service.

17. (currently amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises data representative of one or more items selected from the group consisting of postage amount, date and time of postage information creation, service class, optional data advance, and delivery zip code.

18-21. (cancelled)

22. (currently amended) The method of claim 14, wherein the indexing tracking ID is ~~applied to the mail piece~~ in a barcode format, and the indexing tracking ID is read using a barcode reader.

23. (original) The method of claim 22, wherein the barcode format is two-dimensional barcode format.

24. (original) The method of claim 22, wherein the barcode format is a one-dimensional barcode format.

25. (original) The method of claim 14, wherein the indexing tracking ID is applied to the mail piece in a human-readable format, and the indexing tracking ID is read using an optical character reader.

26. (cancelled)

27. (currently amended) A centralized postage-issuing computer system for indexing a postage indicium, comprising:
data processing circuitry;
a database;

a postage indicium generation module, operable with the data processing circuitry, configured for generating a data corresponding to a postage indicium;

an indexing module, operable with the data processing circuitry, configured for associating an indexing tracking ID with the data corresponding to the postage indicium, wherein the indexing tracking ID and postage indicium are independent; ~~and~~

a database management module, operable with the data processing circuitry, configured for storing the indexed data corresponding to the postage indicium within the database, and for retrieving the indexed data corresponding to the postage indicium from the database based on the indexing tracking ID; and

a communications module, operable with the data processing circuitry, configured for transmitting the indexing tracking ID to an end user computer, for receiving a postage indicium request containing the indexing tracking ID from a postal authority, and for transmitting the retrieved indexed data corresponding to the postage indicium to the postal authority.

28. (currently amended) The centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 27, wherein the indexing tracking ID is unique within a postal authority service.

29. (currently amended) The centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 28, wherein the postal authority system is the United States Postal Service.

30. (currently amended) The centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 27, wherein the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises data representative of one or more items selected from the group consisting of postage amount, date and time of postage information creation, service class, optional data advance, and delivery zip code.

31. (currently amended) The centralized postage-issuing computer system claim 27, wherein the postage indicium generation module is configured for generating [[a]] self-validating data corresponding to the postage indicium in response to the indexing identifier request, the indexing module is configured for associating the indexing tracking ID with the self-validating data corresponding to the postage indicium, and the database management module is configured

for storing the indexed self-validating data corresponding to the postage indicium within the database.

32. (currently amended) The centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 31, wherein the postage indicium generation module comprises:

a postage indicium generation submodule for generating the data corresponding to the postage indicium;

a digital signature generation submodule for generating ~~a~~ a digital signature; and

an association submodule for associating the digital signature with the data corresponding to the postage indicium to generate the self-validating indexed data corresponding to the postage indicium.

33. (currently amended) The centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 27, wherein the database is ~~associated~~ communicatively coupled with a local physically secure coprocessor device.

34. (currently amended) The centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 27, wherein the communications module is further configured for receiving an indexing identifier request from an end user computer, ~~and for transmitting the indexing tracking ID to the end-user computer.~~

35. (cancelled)

36. (currently amended) The centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 27, wherein

the postage indicium generation module is configured for generating a plurality of data sets corresponding to a plurality of postage indicia;

the indexing module is configured for associating a plurality of indexing tracking IDs with the plurality of data sets corresponding to the plurality of postage indicia; and

the database management module is configured for storing the plurality of indexed data sets corresponding to the plurality of postage indicia within the database, and for retrieving the plurality of indexed data sets corresponding to the plurality of postage indicia from the database based on the plurality of indexing tracking IDs.

37. (previously presented) The centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 36, wherein the communications module is configured for receiving a plurality of indexing identifier requests from a plurality of end user computers, and for transmitting the plurality of indexing tracking IDs to the plurality of end user computers.

38. (currently amended) The centralized postage-issuing computer system of claim 36, wherein the communications module is configured for receiving a plurality of postage indicium requests containing the plurality of indexing tracking IDs from a postal authority, and for transmitting the plurality of retrieved indexed data sets corresponding to the plurality of postage indicia to the postal authority.

39-65. (cancelled)

66. (new) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
requesting the indexing tracking ID from the postal authority; and
receiving the indexing tracking ID from the postal authority.

67. (new) The method of claim 1, wherein the indexing tracking ID is independently readable.

68. (new) The method of claim 14, wherein the mail piece does not have the data corresponding to the postage indicium located thereon.

69. (new) The method of claim 14, further comprising validating the mail piece.

70. (new) A method of processing a mail piece, the method comprising:
sending, from an end user computer, postage information related to a mail piece and a request for an indexing tracking ID to a vendor-controlled centralized postage issuing computer system, wherein the vendor is in communication with a postal authority and wherein the postage information is configured to allow the vendor to generate data corresponding to a postage indicium for the mail piece, the indexing tracking ID being associated with the data corresponding to the postage indicium;
receiving the indexing tracking ID at the end user computer; and
applying the indexing tracking ID to the mail piece, wherein the indexing tracking ID is independently readable from any postage indicium present on the mail piece.

71. (new) The method of claim 70, further comprising:
receiving data corresponding to a postage indicium, wherein the postage indicium data is based on the postage information; and
applying the postage indicium to the mail piece.

72. (new) The method of claim 71, wherein the indexing tracking ID is unique within a postal authority.

73. (new) The method of claim 72, wherein the postal authority is the United States Postal Service.

74. (new) The method of claim 72, wherein the data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises data representative of one or more items selected from the group consisting of postage amount, date and time of postage information creation, service class, optional data advance, and delivery zip code.

75. (new) The method of claim 72, wherein the received data corresponding to the postage indicium comprises a digital signature.

76. (new) The method of claim 72, wherein the centralized postage issuing computer system is controlled by a vendor in communication with the postal authority.

77. (new) The method of claim 71, wherein the indexing tracking ID is applied to the mail piece in a barcode format independent from the postage indicium.

78. (new) The method of claim 77, wherein the barcode format is a two-dimensional barcode format.

79. (new) The method of claim 77, wherein the barcode format is a one-dimensional barcode format.

80. (new) The method of claim 71, wherein the indexing tracking ID is applied to the mail piece in a human-readable format independent of the postage indicium.

81. (new) The method of claim 71, wherein the postage indicium is applied in a machine readable format.

82. (new) The method of claim 70, further comprising mailing the mail piece without a postage indicium.

83. (new) The method of claim 70, wherein the postage information and the request for an indexing tracking ID are sent together by the end user computer.

84. (new) The method of claim 70, wherein the postage information and the request for an indexing tracking ID are sent separately by the end user computer.